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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed sample cross-examinations in order to describe the different question and answer types that debaters use. Transcripts of five cross-examinations, which represented a variety of debate experience levels, and which were recorded at a Cross Examination Debate Association Tournament held in the Southeastern region during the 1986 Spring semester, were examined. After transcription, the dialogue was divided into units of talk, defined as a speaker's utterance occurring between the other speaker's previous and next talk. Results indicated that recording, transcribing, and coding cross-examinations was an effective method of describing the types of questions and answers utilized by debaters. Results showed that: (1) there was a fairly even number of X questions (questions having interrogative syntax and beginning with words such as when, why, who, how, which, or what) and Yes/No questions; (2) X questions prompt X answers; (3) Yes/No questions usually prompt Yes/No answers; and (4) both types of questions risk non-responsiveness by the respondent that may be intentional. Results suggest that it is sensible for debaters to use X or "wh-" questions to elicit further information about a particular issue, and that the questioner should utilize Yes/No questions to verify his or her interpretation of an issue. Results further suggest that debaters should be aware that since Yes/No questions may tend to prompt X answers, the questioner should take great care in phrasing questions so that the response is limited. (Twenty-one references are attached.) (PRA)

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Uses and Abuses of Cross Examination: Preliminary Descriptive Analysis and Pragmatic Considerations of Question and Answer Types in Intercollegiate Debate

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The art of cross-examination is integral to the achievement of the pedagogical and competitive goals of debate. However, participants and educators alike frequently underestimate its worth. Cross-examination is most commonly thought of as a part of formal advocacy situations such as intercollegiate debate or an attorney's questioning of a witness in a courtroom setting. However, cross-examination is a skill vital to many other advocacy and nonadvocacy situations. Audience debates, classroom situations, job interviews, and counseling situations all require the skill of asking and answering questions effectively (Ziegelmueller & Dause, 1975). The importance of cross-examination to intercollegiate debate was first proposed by J. Stanley Gray in 1926. Gray's "Oregon plan" was first adopted by the National Forensic League in 1952 (Blyton & Bradley, 1963). Cross-examination is now the format used in almost all high school and college debate tournaments. The founders of CEDA considered the art of cross-examination so fundamental to the debate process that they based the name of the organization on it.

Many authors note the importance of cross-examination. Cross-examination provides the opportunity for the promotion of direct clash (Blyton & Bradley, 1963). Its emphasis on confrontation allows more effective assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of argumentation in a debate and motivates debaters to prepare more thoroughly. Development

of cross-examination skills prepare debaters for future careers in law and other fields of advocacy (Ehninger & Brockriede, 1978). Cross-examination also makes debates more interesting to audiences and ensures more satisfactory rebuttals (Baird, 1950). Some authors even argue that debates are won and lost in cross-examination (Wood & Cirlin, 1989).

Various authors have described the purposes of cross-examination in intercollegiate debate in different ways. Ehninger and Brockriede (1978) describe the objectives of cross-examination as:

> (1) clarification of a plan and its rationale and of the central negative positions; (2) defining or exposing issues so judges have a reasonable basis for choosing one position over another; and (3) exposing weaknesses and/or inconsistencies in an opponent's case . . . (p. 207).

Blyton and Bradley (1963) provide a similar traditional interpretation of the purposes of cross-examination:

> (1) To elicit information for clarification; (2) To aid in the development of a constructive case; or (3) To assist in the tearing down of the opponent's case (p. 287).

Ziegelmueller and Dause (1975) revised and added to these traditional descriptions by arguing that the purposes of cross-examination are fourfold:

> (1) to permit the gathering and clarifying of information, (2) to facilitate the examination of data, (3) to expose weaknesses in analysis, and (4) to undermine the credibility of the respondent (p. 215).

By arguing that cross-examination has both substantive and psychological aspects, Ziegelmueller and Dause (1975) emphasize the crucial role of cross-examination in establishing the credibility of debaters (p. 217). Wood and Cirlin (1989), when describing the challenge of cross-examination in value debate, offer similar analysis of the purposes of cross-examination. They argue that cross-examination can be used "to clarify any part of an opponent's presentation" (p. 153). Cross-examination also serves as a basis for attacking an opponent's reasoning and evidence and for establishing a defense of a debater's own position.

The extent to which students effectively utilize cross-examination, no matter what its purpose, is arguable. After more than a few years of participation in the activity as debater, coach, and critic, we feel that the vast majority of participants do <u>not</u> use the cross-examination periods for any strategic advantage. In fact, debaters hardly seem to consider cross-examination as a valuable argumentation tool. Norton (1983) explains:

> It is atypical for any given cross-examination period to result in information that changes the outcome of a round. More generally, cross-examination has become "prep-time in drag," a period where one partner asks for the opportunity to examine or re-read materials while the other, paying little or no attention, prepares for the next . . . [speech]. It does not seem unfair to say that cross-examination, one third of all the speaking periods in a debate, is, more often than not, a waste of time (p. 29).

Norton seems to blame the examiner for not asking probing and relevant questions. The respondent can also be at fault. It is not uncommon for the respondent to ignore or evade the specific question posed.

There are many articles on cross-examination in forensics literature that address cross-examination (See, for example, Church & Wilbanks, 1986; Ehninger & Brockriede, 1978; Freeley, 1990; Fryar, Thomas, & Goodnight, 1989; Lee & Lee, 1989; Fuge & Newman, 1956; Grant, 1978; Patterson & Zarefsky, 1983; Rieke & Sillars, 1984; Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991; Wood & Goodnight, 1985; Ziegelmueller, Kay, & Dause, 1990). Most are either "laundry lists" of suggestions or discussions based on some normative perception of how cross-examination participants should behave. Some present real or contrived samples of cross-examination to illustrate what the participant should or should not do in cross-

examination. I am not aware of any work that attempts to describe the use of different question and answer types in cross-examinations.

Generally, the purpose of this project is to analyze sample cross-examinations and describe the question and answer types that debaters use. We examined transcripts[1] of five of seven cross-examinations recorded at a Cross Examination Debate Association Tournament held in the Southeastern region during the 1986 Spring semester (two cross-examinations were not transcribed because of poor recording quality). The cross-examinations represent a variety of debate experience levels from beginner to varsity. After transcription, the dialogue was divided into units of talk (defined as a speaker's utterance occurring between the other speaker's previous and next talk).

Question Types

Our concern is the identification of different kinds of questions and answers in intercollegiate cross-examinations. Question categorization relies upon characteristics of the syntax surface and the expected answer (Stubbs, 1983). There are three basic types of questions: X, or wh-, questions; yes/no questions; and tag questions.

The X question.

Stubbs (19883) states that the first type, referred to as the X question, has "interrogative syntax and begin[s] with one of a closed class of words: where, when, who,

whose, which, what, how" (p. 107). There are, however, X questions that do not begin with a restrictive wh- word (or "how," which is considered a wh- word for clarity's sake) (Stubbs, 1983). For example, in "Do you know where the briefcase is?" the wh- word is contained in the embedded clause "where the briefcase is" and can be considered the same as "Where is the briefcase?"

The yes/no question.

The second type of interrogative is the yes/no question, in which the expected answer is either "yes" or "no" (Stubbs, 1983). One would not always expect the respondent to a yes/no question to answer with a literal "yes" or "no." However, answers to yes/no questions are interpreted as either "yes" or "no." While there seems to be a clear distinction between X and yes/no questions, one could argue that yes/no questions should be treated as X questions. Like wh- questions, yes/no queries ask the respondent to supply an unknown variable (Stubbs, 1983). However, we view the unknown variable of each type of question as a clear distinguishing factor. In X questions, the unknown variable is restricted by the wh- word, but it is less restricted than the unknown variable of a yes/no question. Indeed, the latter's variable can be replaced by only "yes" or "no"; the wh- variable may be replaced by many things. This difference in restrictiveness is particularly evident in the competitive atmosphere of intercollegiate debate: respondents will often try to qualify seemingly

simple "yes" or "no" answers. Thus far, we have described two types of questions: X and yes/no.

The tag question.

The third type of query is the tag question. These are formed by adding a tag such as "isn't it?" to a declarative statement (Lyons, 1977). Lyons (1977) delineates two kinds of tag questions (copy tags and checking tags):

> [The function of copy tags] is to express the speaker's attitude (surprise, skepticism, irony, scorn, etc.) towards the state-of-affairs described by the proposition expressed by the declarative sentence to which they are attached . . . (p. 764).

Lyons continues:

> [The] function of the checking tag is expressly to solicit the addressee's acceptance or rejection of the proposition that is presented to him (p. 765).

We classify tag questions as yes/no questions. A debater seems just as likely to phrase a question as a tag as she or he is a yes/no question. Even if one thought about the distinction during a debate, one probably would not waste time deciding which phrasing would be best. In any case, the answers to either question type are similar in that they both supply a yes or no type of response.[3]

Overall, there are three types of queries: X, also called "wh-", questions utilize words such as "what," "why," and "where." Yes/no and tag questions seek agreement or

disagreement. Although yes/no and tag questions are structured differently, they are considered as one category for the purposes of this study. Answers were categorized according to the same scheme. An answer that provided "wh-" information was classified as an X answer. Answers that provided agreement/disagreement were classified as yes/no questions. In the next section, we explain our analysis of the coded transcriptions.

Analysis

There were 268 total units of talk. Eight units were unidentifiable. Eighteen units were classified as unsuccessful interruptions (the current speaker simply continued, uninterrupted). Subtracting the unintelligible and unsuccessful interruption units leaves a total of 234 units of talk (the number of unsuccessful interruptions was subtracted twice, since the talk following the unsuccessful interruption unit would then be considered part of the talk preceding the unsuccessful interruption). Thus, there were 117 units of talk by the questioners and 117 units of talk by the respondents.

Questions.

Of the 117 units of talk by questioners, 91 were questions. As mentioned previously, questions fall into two broad categories: X and Y/N. The cross-examinations reveal 42 instances of X questions and 49 instances of Y/N questions. An overall difference of five does not seem

noteworthy. However, the differences in specific cross-examinations is interesting. Although there is a difference of two or less X and Y/N questions posed in three of the cross-examination periods, the remaining two cross-examinations manifest differences of seven and four, respectively.

In one of those cross-examinations, there are seven X questions and fourteen Y/N questions. The difference may be because of the use of tag questions in place of X questions.

CX1

Q: Philosophy--you say the reason why to say it harms is because the philosophy stops MNCs right?

A: not the philosophy, the actual nationalization which is occurring.

This example could easily have been phrased as an X question and, in fact, is implicitly an X question given the use of the word "why."

The difference of four in the other cross-examination is problematic. That particular cross-examination consisted of novice debaters with probably less than one year's experience between them. Indeed, the transcript indicates the questioner is not sure what he wants to ask or how he should ask it:

CX7

Q: Right ok, let's say UN doesn't work just for fun, umm how does this apply? How does this impact? If UN doesn't work you can't get beneficial to the US whether it furthers our interests.

Overall, then, the cross-examinations exhibit a fairly equal distribution of X and Y/N questions.

Answers.

One might expect that an X question would prompt an X answer and that a Y/N question would prompt a Y/N answer. This is not always the case. Of the 91 units of talk identified as answers, X questions prompted X answers 32 of 42 times, while Y/N questions prompted Y/N answers 35 of 49 times.

In the ten instances in which X questions did not prompt an X answer, the respondent was begging the question. For example:

CX1

Q: . . . If we pull out the UN is destroyed and that means that the NIEO goes away?

A: Right.

Q: Where's the evidence that says that?

A: That says what?

CX4

Q: OK and where's the link to the US?

A: What do you mean where's the link to the US?

Both respondents seem to avoid answering the question by directing clarifying questions to the questioner. Another method of not answering is to simply ignore the question. Of course, this tactic does not always succeed:

CX1

Q: Where's the evidence saying that they're going to attack us? Do you present any evidence saying that?

A: That they'll attack us?

Q: Right.

A: I didn't present any.

The questioner is persistent and gets the respondent to answer. A final, and perhaps legitimate, way of avoiding a query is to question its assumptions.

CX7

Q: . . . If UN doesn't work you can't get beneficial to the US whether it furthers our interests--

A: Well I don't buy UN doesn't work. I have read many pieces of evidence that--

Q: But let's just set this up--

A: Yeah well how can I say- how can I pretend when it's something I don't believe?

The respondent refuses to answer a question based on an assumption with which he disagreed. Thus, respondents avoid answering X questions by seeking clarification of the question, ignoring the question, or rejecting the assumption of the question.

In fourteen instances, Y/N questions did not prompt Y/N answers. In five of these, the respondent seemed to be answering an X question.

CX1

Q: Card is just talking about tech development, right?

A: What it's talking about is those who are to develop it [ ].

Instead of replying yes or no, the respondent attempts to explain what the evidence card means; as though he had been asked "What does that card say?" In another, lengthy example, the questioner re-states two of the respondent's previous answers to verify understanding of them. Rather than providing that verification, the respondent attempts to reexplain his position. Several replies to Y/N questions were non-responsive. In one example, the respondent was unable to answer the question, but admitted that he just did not know the answer. However, other respondents seemed to beg the question, as previously explained in the discussion of non-responsive answers to X questions. Overall, Y/N questions prompt Y/N answers, some X answers, and non-responsiveness.

Implications

Recording, transcribing, and coding cross-examinations is an effective method of describing the types of questions

and answers utilized by debaters.[3] Based on this preliminary descriptive analysis, we offer the following conclusions:

1. Generally, there is a fairly even number of X and Y/N questions.
2. X questions prompt X answers.
3. Y/N questions usually prompt Y/N answers, but sometimes prompt X answers.
4. Both types of questions risk non-responsiveness by the respondent that may be intentional.

These conclusions should prove useful to intercollegiate debaters and forensics educators. First, it seems sensible to use X, or "wh-", questions to elicit further information about a particular issue. The questioner can specify the information desired by choosing the correct "wh-" word: when, why, etc. It then becomes the respondent's responsibility to supply information appropriate to the "wh-" term.

Second, the questioner should utilize Y/N questions to verify his or her interpretation of an issue. In such a case, the questioner does not need an explanation of the issue, merely a confirmation or denial of his or her understanding of the position. If more explanation is necessary, the questioner can utilize an X question.

Third, debaters should be aware that Y/N questions may tend to prompt X answers. In spite of the relatively restrictive nature of Y/N questions (theoretically, the

answerer has only two options: agreement or disagreement), respondents may take the opportunity to explain their positions, whether called upon to do so or not. The questioner should take great care in phrasing questions so that the respondent's limited choices are clear.

If debaters are aware that one type of question tends to prompt a specific type of answer, they may take greater care in preparing for cross-examination. Likewise, respondents might become more attuned with their opponents' objectives in cross-examination, which may result in clearer answers. These implications assume, of course, that the respondent is not deliberately evasive or deceptive.

Finally, we hope that the method utilized in this project will prove useful to other forensics educators. The process of transcription and coding, in and of itself, can provide a great deal of insight and information about the language, style, behavior, etc. of the participants in cross-examination.

Notes

[1] The cross-examinations were independently transcribed by the first author and a second party familiar with intercollegiate debate. The first author reconciled differences between the two transcripts and coded the final transcript and therefore takes responsibility for any errors.

[2] Similarly, we considered requests (for example, "May I look at that card?") as yes/no questions. Since the respondent is under no formal obligation to grant requests, fulfillment or denial of a request was treated as the same as answering a question.

[3] The authors are aware of several limitations of this project, such as the lack of statistical testing, the sample size, and the sampling method (these cross-examinations were chosen because one author was assigned to judge those particular rounds). The primary limitation of the study, though, is its scope. Focusing only on the type of question and answer does not tell us a great deal about the process of cross-examination itself or the utility of a particular cross-examination strategy within the context of the entire debate.

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